

## UB Law Forum

---

Volume 25  
Number 1 *Spring 2012*

Article 22

---

4-1-2012

### A Milestone Celebration: 50th Annual Alumni Dinner Honors Six for Excellence

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum)

---

#### Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2012) "A Milestone Celebration: 50th Annual Alumni Dinner Honors Six for Excellence," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 22.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub\\_law\\_forum/vol25/iss1/22](https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol25/iss1/22)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

# A milestone celebration

## *50th annual Alumni Dinner honors six for excellence*

**N**ot all that glitters is gold, it's said. But as SUNY Buffalo Law alumni gathered May 3 for their golden-anniversary 50th annual Alumni Dinner, there was plenty of glitter in evidence.

Most of the sparkle emanated from the six honorees – five Law School alumni and a non-alumnus – who received Distinguished Alumni Awards at the event, held at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo.

Richard F. DiGiacomo '76, outgoing president of the SUNY Buffalo Law Alumni Association, noted the 50-year milestone and also another major one, an observance of the Law School's 125th anniversary that will begin Sept. 28 with a kickoff at the newly renovated Hotel @ the Lafayette in downtown Buffalo.

Dean Makau Mutua updated the attendees about progress in several areas at the Law School. "What I said to you four years ago is that we at SUNY Buffalo Law were not content to be an OK law school, we were not content to be a good law school, we want to become a great law school," Mutua said. "Before I made that promise, I did not contemplate what was coming our way. The great recession, of course, hit us. We were hit with turbulent headwinds. But I say to you again that this law school will not be victimized by small dreams, no matter what the challenges are. We have risen to those challenges, we have overcome the headwinds, and we have accomplished things that were not thinkable four years ago."

He cited the hiring of 16 new tenure-track faculty members; the academic quality of this year's entering class, whose median GPA is a best-ever 3.57; building renovations and new teaching technologies; and significant efforts to reach out to area attorneys and judges. These improvements, the dean said, come with the support of UB President Satish K. Tripathi and the Law School's alumni:

"You are the difference makers."

Winner of the Distinguished Alumnus Award for the judiciary was **Hon. Cynthia M. Rufe '77**, U.S. District Court judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. A Philadelphia native, Rufe joined the court in 2002 after being nominated by President George W. Bush. She began her legal career as a public defender and in private practice, before being elected to the Bucks County Court of Common Pleas, where she served for eight years.

Laurie Styka Bloom '83, immediate past president of the Law Alumni Association, presented the award, sharing the jurist's long resume of professional and civic accomplishments. The reach of her service includes coordinating volunteer committee to rebuild a covered bridge and founding a suicide-prevention organization. "I'm tired just telling you about everything she's done," Bloom quipped.

**Mark K. Suzumoto '82** was honored for his work in private practice. Suzumoto, who practices corporate litigation as a partner in the Los Angeles law firm Van Etten Suzumoto & Sippelle, is a longtime supporter of the Law School. Since 2004 he has been a member of the Dean's Advisory Council, which advises Dean Mutua on curricular and other matters.

"People who have worked with Mark call him a character guy," the dean said in presenting the award. "They say you will never find a more

hard-working lawyer. His colleague Keith Sippelle describes him as a lawyer's lawyer, a person who will never put the interests of his firm or his own interests before the interests of the client. I want the young lawyers in the room to hear that. He puts the client first. That is the nobility of our profession."

**Vincent E. Doyle III '89**, partner in the Buffalo law firm Connors & Vilar-do, was honored for his community service. Doyle has served as president of the New York State Bar Association since June 2011. He also served in the bar association's House of Delegates and on the Executive Committee, and chaired its Criminal Justice Section.

Said presenter James W. Grable Jr. '96, vice president of the Law Alumni Association: "I can't think of a better way to enhance the image and reputation of our Law School and our profession, and I can't think of a better way for a lawyer to improve his or her community, than by tireless efforts to serve the underserved, represent the unrepresented, and remember the sometimes forgotten participants in our justice system. Vince dedicated his presidency and stewardship of our state bar association to the theme 'Justice for All.' It was a rally to action and a reminder of the good all of us as lawyers can accomplish with the education we received from our Law School."

**William J. Hochul Jr. '84**, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of New York, in Buffalo, received the Distinguished Alumnus Award for public service. Hochul has served with the U.S. Attorney's office since 1991; he has been chief of the office's anti-terrorism unit, as anti-terrorism advisory council coordinator, as chief of the national security division and as confidential human source coordinator. He also has prosecuted some of the biggest federal cases in Western New York.

In presenting the award, Mary Pat

*“You are the difference makers.” – Dean Makau W. Mutua*



Left to right,  
front row:  
Vincent E. Doyle III '89,  
Mark K. Suzumoto '82,  
Cynthia M. Rufe '77  
and William J. Hochul  
Jr. '84

Back row:  
Jill M. Bond '85 and  
Michael S. Taheri

Enright Fleming '85 said, “Bill is a tireless and energetic public servant who has dedicated himself to improving the safety and well-being of the Western New York community.” Besides his prosecutorial work, she said, Hochul is actively involved in a group called Bridges, which works to foster positive relations between the Muslim community and law enforcement. He also, she said, is the holder of a martial arts black belt, “which has certainly enhanced his management skills in the office.”

**Jill M. Bond '85**, senior vice president and general counsel for Rich Products Corp. in Buffalo, received the award for her performance in the business world. She is also a former member of the Law School's Dean's Advisory Council.

Presenter Brian D. Gwitt '98 noted

that Bond started with Rich Products as corporate counsel and, in just eight years, rose to become general counsel of this \$2.8 billion global company. “She's handled her success with grace and humility, which is a wonderful trait to have,” he said.

Finally, **Michael S. Taheri**, partner in the Buffalo firm Taheri & Todor, received the award for outstanding service to the University and community by a non-alumnus. Taheri is a longtime adjunct instructor at the Law School, teaching courses in DWI law, white-collar crime and law firm management. He also is a thoroughly involved volunteer at St. Luke's Mission of Mercy, on Buffalo's East Side, where he teaches and mentors high school and college students and helps them prepare for a career.

In presenting the award, DiGiacomo

said that Taheri calls St. Luke's his “second home” and noted that several of the students he has mentored were present at the dinner. “This award tonight is especially noteworthy because Mike is an example to all of us lawyers of how a busy, well-recognized, excellent and successful lawyer can devote a major part of his life to a not-for-profit cause, the cause of helping underprivileged young people on Buffalo's East Side,” DiGiacomo said. “The award shows all of us that in addition to assisting our clients, we can find a way to help people in need.”

Co-chairs of the 50th annual Alumni Dinner were Alan J. Bozer '84, Mary Pat Enright Fleming '85 and Brian D. Gwitt '98. Brian M. Melber '96 is the president-elect of the SUNY Buffalo Law Alumni Association.